

THE SafetyZone

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

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CREATING SAFE SCHOOLS

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SHOOTINGS ADD URGENCY TO PREVENTION EFFORTS

By ELIZABETH ADAMS

As spring was arriving at Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky, Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, students and staff were approaching the one-year anniversaries of tragic school shootings. Then, on April 20—to the dismay of all who had prayed, after Springfield, “Let the violence end here”—the nation’s attention was riveted on yet another catastrophic incident of school violence at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

At the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS), these horrific events lend even more urgency to our goal of helping school communities prevent violence. “The recent school shootings all speak to a need for creating safe school environments throughout the nation,” says NRCSS Director Carlos Sundermann. While the Center continues its work to prevent future violence and create safer school communities, our staff is also taking stock of the lessons to be learned from the past year’s events.

NO EASY ANSWERS

Schools across the country are devoting energy and money to increasing school safety, investigating everything from gunpowder-sniffing dogs to metal detectors. Some districts are teaching their faculty self-defense; some legislators have even suggested that teachers should be armed.

Although debates have flared over which measures will be most prudent, the national dialogue has led to greater awareness of the need for prevention by schools, educators, and the public.

Dr. Arthur Kellerman of Emory University in Atlanta said in an interview on CBS, “Three years ago, if you gave me a half million dollars, I would have said to buy more metal detectors. Today I’d take that money and use it to train the principal, the teachers, key student leaders on how to work together to build a safer community.”

Similarly, Bill Modzeleski, Director of the U.S. Department of Education’s Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, told *U.S. News and World Report*, “Security and added law enforcement play



AP PHOTO/MICHAEL S.

a role, but if that’s all you do, you’ll fail abysmally.” When students who had experienced school violence firsthand were called to testify before the House Education and the Workforce Committee’s early childhood, youth, and family subcommittee in May, they cited lack of parental involvement, inadequate juvenile gun control legislation, and insufficient counseling opportunities for troubled youth as contributing factors to violence and issues to address in prevention. The focus on prevention has also increased aware-

ness of the need for mental health services. Jennifer Joseph, in an article for ABCNEWS.com, pointed out the irony of sending 100 mental health counselors to greet returning Columbine students on their first day back at school. “Where were these counselors in the weeks and months before the shootings?” she asked. But as Susan Gorin, Executive Director of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), noted in the same article, the counselors were probably doing what they were. Please see Prevention, page

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told to do: coordinating schedules and helping with college applications. "It's only the squeaky wheel that gets attention," Gorin said. According to Joseph, there is currently only one school counselor for every 1,800 students in this country.

In an effort to improve school response to crisis, the NRCSS met with a group of school psychologists from schools affected by violence. Psychologists attending the National Association of School Psychologists annual conference in March (only days before the shooting in Littleton) highlighted the following as crucial planning considerations for crisis response:

- Attention must be paid to effective prevention before any crisis occurs.
- It is not enough to have crisis-response policies. Coordinated efforts

to implement such plans are also necessary, with clear communication of these plans to everyone who will participate, including students, parents, staff, and community coalitions.

- School psychologists are vital to the response process, as they understand school protocol and limitations. Schools should have cooperative release agreements in place so that trained professionals can respond quickly.

- There must be a mechanism for screening and certifying volunteer counselors.

- Long-term crisis response plans need to be in place in addition to short-term ones; survivors recover at varying rates.

MEDIA IMPACT

The extensive news coverage of the Littleton crisis also led to a rash of copycat incidents and an awareness

of the need for schools to plan how to deal with the media.

According to David Silber, a psychology professor at George Washington University, events such as Littleton can trigger those already drawn to violence. "This jolts them or motivates them to do what they'd toyed with doing anyway," Silber told *The Washington Post*. One major newspaper, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, has taken a stand against placing the news of school shootings on the front page in order to avoid frightening young schoolchildren or contributing to copycat crimes.

Among the copycat events immediately after the April shootings: Two students were killed, and one wounded, by a high school dropout wearing a blue trench coat at W.R. Myers Public High School in Taber, Alberta, Canada. In Port Huron, Michigan, schools were closed after a bomb was found in a middle

CALLS FOR HELP INCREASE

Recent incidents of school violence have increased the calls for assistance and information received by the National Resource Center for Safe Schools. Immediately after the incident at Heritage High School, for instance, a staff member from NRCSS was enroute to Conyers, Georgia.

- **CRISIS RESPONSE:** When Jon Yeakey, NRCSS Training and Technical Assistance Specialist, arrived in Conyers a day after the shooting, he found an efficient crisis-response plan in place to help the school deal with the situation and quickly return to the business of

learning. The day of the shooting (a Thursday), the school set up a temporary site in the field house to handle all media requests and arranged for installation of two phone lines. The next day, the site was moved to the Sheriff's Department, and the school was able to reclaim the school site from law-enforcement officials.

Janitors worked through the weekend, cleaning and painting so that the school could reopen on Monday. Faculty and police worked together to protect students from media questioning. The Rockdale County Police had in place a general crisis plan, outlining jurisdiction to avoid turf issues between the many agencies that responded (including the FBI, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and state, local, and county law-

enforcement agencies). The week after the crisis, Yeakey met with representatives from the local school district and sheriff's office to facilitate a discussion of "the crisis plan, what worked, and what didn't." This debriefing process proved so helpful, Yeakey said, that the NRCSS now recommends that schools "build time for debriefing into any crisis-response plan."

- **MEDIA REQUESTS:** The NRCSS also has been working to raise public awareness of prevention strategies by responding to requests from the media. After the Littleton crisis, the NRCSS responded to more than 30 calls from such media organizations as the *Los Angeles Times*, *The* Please see Calls, page 8

school. In Alaska, a boy brought a stolen .44 Magnum pistol to his middle school. A New Hampshire high school received a threat shortly before Tipper Gore arrived to talk about the Columbine shootings. And in Conyers, Georgia, on May 20, the one-month anniversary of the Columbine shootings, a student at Heritage High School—recently named an outstanding school by *U.S. News and World Report*—shot and wounded six students before the vice principal approached him, demanding, “Give me the gun.”

The National Resource Center for Safe Schools recommends that schools plan for working with the media as part of their crisis-response preparation. Such planning might help other schools avoid the way events unfolded in Littleton. While the crisis was still underway there, television stations received calls from students trapped

inside the school. The broadcast of this information inadvertently put the lives of these students at risk by letting the shooters know of their location.

Cherie Kistner, Public Information Officer for the Springfield Public School District, has developed a media-response tipsheet for schools:

- Prepare an immediate statement to acknowledge the crisis that has occurred. This will increase the chance of having accurate media reports. Provide regular briefings, as well.
- Assemble a team to serve as a clearinghouse for phone calls from the media and the community. Triage phone calls, making priorities clear to callers.
- Set clear boundaries for the media early, and stick to them. Thurston High School has consistently asked that the media not intrude on the school day.
- Select spokespeople and announce their availability. Create talking points

and coordinate the flow of information so that all speakers are giving a consistent message.

- Set up an information center away from the school to coordinate the release of information.

- Plan how to work with the media in the days following a crisis. Use the media as a partner to communicate with the community at large. Be timely, accurate, honest, and authoritative, and don’t be afraid to say, at any given time, what you know and what you don’t.

The staff of the NRCSS will continue to work with schools to plan for potential crises and to facilitate exchange of information among crisis-response experts and organizations such as NASP, state education agencies, and local schools. As President Clinton told the nation, the incident at Littleton has “pierced the soul” of the American public and provided a wakeup call to us all.

SCHOOLS SHOULD
PLAN FOR WORKING
WITH THE MEDIA
AS PART OF THEIR
CRISIS-RESPONSE
PREPARATION.

LESSONS FROM JONESBORO

For Suzann Wilson, whose daughter Brittney was killed in a school shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas, last March, the recent school violence in Littleton “brings back all the pain and heartache we felt a year ago. It makes me even more determined to work for safer schools for our children.”

The National Resource Center for Safe Schools asked Wilson to share the lessons learned in Jonesboro so that others might gain wisdom from her community’s tragic experience. Her comments might be valuable to schools planning for crisis response, especially in preparing to deal with the longer-term consequences of crises.

Here are the highlights of her message:

“After the shooting, a lot of the children who were not harmed physically suffered guilt and shame. The shame was from feeling being happy to be alive, while five others had died. The guilt was from having escaped death while some of their friends did not. They faced the horror of going back to school and not feeling safe again.

“The crisis-response team at our school was trained to deal with these emotions and help the children understand their feelings. They were there to help students go back to school and face their fears. Team members went with many of the children as they traced their steps back to the day of the shooting. They offered support to parents on how

to deal with the nightmares and how to deal with their child’s fear of school. The team has helped parents with the questions they could not find answers for.

“My family went for counseling for a year after Brittney’s death. I truly believe that counseling helped us find our way back to being a family. Much as we tried to prepare for our daughter Brandi’s return to school, it was hard to take her to school and then drive off. I had to find a way to let my surviving children be out of my presence. I experienced panic and anxiety when they were not in the same room with me. Brandi slept in our room for six months after Brittney’s death, because I was afraid I would not be able to save her.

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LEAD WITH STRENGTHS TO PROMOTE RESILIENCY

Why do some young people get involved in risky, even violent behavior while others avoid trouble? Well-documented risk factors of youth violence—including drug and alcohol abuse, family distress, and gang membership—offer only partial answers. Also significant are the protective factors that help resilient youth develop positive life skills despite early challenges.

Building on the strengths of young people is a critical need in safe school planning, according to Bonnie Benard, a leading resiliency researcher. “The challenge for the 1990s,” she wrote in *Fostering Resiliency in Kids* (Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities, 1991) “is the implementation of prevention strategies that strengthen protective factors in our families, schools, and communities.”

Drawing on the lessons of resiliency research, school and community-based programs can incorporate prevention strategies that focus on building strengths in young people.

Such programs include youth courts, mentoring, service learning, law-related education, and other academic programming that nurtures a “resiliency attitude” in the classroom.

Nan Henderson, M.S.W., in *Resiliency in Practice* (Spring 1997), outlines four steps that educators, families, and community members can take to promote resiliency in young people:

- Maintain a “resiliency attitude” by focusing on students’ strengths, not their weaknesses.
 - Delineate strengths with the same or even greater meticulousness as used in cataloguing weaknesses. Adults who interact with young people need training to be able to focus on capabilities with the same detail they use to pinpoint problems.
 - Build a “Resiliency Wheel” around each child to provide protection and support for what Henderson calls the child’s “self-righting tendency.”
- Promote environmental strategies that move children toward resiliency by:

- Increasing bonding with adults and peers
- Setting clear and consistent boundaries
- Teaching life skills
- Providing caring and support
- Setting and communicating high expectations
- Providing opportunities for meaningful participation
- Never give up. Survivors of difficult childhoods often cite the persistence of caring individuals as a major contributor toward resiliency.

Online resources on resiliency include:

- Resiliency in Action, www.resiliency.com/recent.html
- The Child and Family Resiliency Research Programme, www.quasar.ualberta.ca/cfrfp/cfrfp.html
- National Network for Family Resiliency, www.nnfr.org
- Resilient Communities, www.resilientcommunities.org/home.html

CONFERENCES FOCUS ON AMERICA'S SCHOOLS

Regional Conferences on Improving America’s Schools, to be presented in three cities by the U.S. Department of Education this fall, will offer “one of the most comprehensive conferences on education reform,” promises Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley.

“Creating Safe Schools and Healthy Students,” a topic of particular interest to those developing safe school programs, is one of 11 critical issues to be addressed indepth at the three-day events, including a look at the latest research findings, case studies, and implementation strategies.

The 1999 Regional Conferences, geared for teachers, administrators,

parents, members of community-based educational organizations, and others involved in delivering education, are intended to teach participants how to:

- Coordinate federal programs
- Integrate federal programs with state and local efforts
- Access the Department of Education’s technical-assistance network
- Use resources to implement comprehensive school reform

Participants will also learn about funding opportunities from the Department of Education and federally sponsored technical assistance providers. Model programs will be showcased to give participants a look at how schools

are addressing issues of school climate and working with external agencies to bring about school improvements.

The 1999 Regional Conferences on Improving America’s Schools are scheduled for October 6-9 in Tampa, Florida; November 8-10 in Salt Lake City, Utah; and December 15-17 in Chicago, Illinois. Registration information is available by phone at (800) 203-5494, or online at www.ncbe.gwu.edu/iasconferences. To subscribe to the Improving America’s Schools Conference Listserv, interested parties may send an e-mail message, including their name and e-mail address, to: ias_conference@ed.gov.

HOW DOES RESILIENCY LOOK? MEET ADAM CORNELL

By the time he was a senior at Woodinville High School in Woodinville, Washington, Adam Cornell had lived in a dozen different foster homes, experienced three disrupted adoptions, been removed from his mother's custody three times, and was permanently separated from his sister and two brothers. By any measure, he was off the charts in risk factors.

Yet in September 1990, the fall of his senior year, Cornell won the Boys and Girls Clubs of America National Youth of the Year Award, receiving a \$5,000 scholarship from Reader's Digest Association Inc., and a plaque from President George Bush.

Rick Goings, President of Avon U.S. and one of the competition judges, told *The Seattle Times* that Cornell was chosen because he "exemplified" the ideas of the Boys and Girls Club. "The hardships he has overcome, combined with his leadership abilities and personal achievements, helped him win the national title."

Cornell, who had been a participant in the Boys and Girls Clubs since the age of six, received the award for his work as a mentor, tutor, sports coach, and day camp counselor to younger children. He was also president of his high school student body, a spokesperson for the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program, and a member of the board of Northshore Youth and Family Services.

After facing so many heartbreaks in his childhood, how has Cornell managed to serve as a positive example to so many people? Today, at age 27, he says simply, "At each stage of my life, wherever I was, I always managed to have one meaningful relationship with an adult—a teacher, a coach, a Boys and Girls Club counselor. It let me know that someone cared about me. A child can do just about anything if the child feels loved and significant in some way." He goes on, "I had terrific teachers. Even though I went to more than a dozen public schools, it seemed there was always a teacher somewhere who would do something as simple as give me a hug. When you're a child going through what I was going through, you're just starved for love."

During the year he was National Youth of the Year, he traveled through the United States, speaking at 200 fund-raising events. "I wanted the kids to know they could overcome adversity, and that the Boys and Girls Club could help," he says.

Unfortunately, Cornell's difficulties didn't end in high school. At the end of his senior year, his father committed suicide. His father, a single man who had adopted him when Cornell was 14, suffered from chronic mental illness. Cornell acknowledges that the placement was probably a mistake, yet he credits his father with giving him a home. "For the first

time in my life," he says, "I lived in the same place for four years."

Cornell turned to a favorite teacher, his high school civics teacher, for help. The teacher told him, "What's in the way is the way."

His father's death meant that when Cornell went off to American University to major in government, he had no place to come home to. Nevertheless, he turned his energies to others, spending his free time mentoring juvenile offenders. Later he transferred to Georgetown University, graduating in 1995 and enrolling in the Peace Corps.

Cornell traveled to Georgetown, Guyana, in South America, where he worked with both juvenile and adult offenders in Georgetown's prisons. Cornell taught life skills including anger management, conflict resolution, goal setting, and self-esteem to juvenile offenders. He set up the first Narcotics Anonymous group in a Guyana prison for adult offenders.

Cornell has just finished his first year at Northwestern School of Law of Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, and is looking forward to a summer clerkship with the Juvenile Rights Project. He is co-chair of the law school's Public Interest Law Project (PILP). In addition, he devotes 10 hours a month to his work as a Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for children in the custody of the state. "I had a CASA," he explains. "Now I want to be a CASA."

Cornell is also a full-time member of a family. Right after his father's suicide, he was contacted by a couple from King County in Washington. They had gotten to know him through the Boys and Girls Club. They had read about his father's death and wrote, "What can we do to help?" When he was 23, he was adopted as an adult. He says, "My original family didn't work, my first adoptive placement didn't work. The third time's the charm."

Cornell is uncertain exactly what role the law will play in his future. "My real passion is advocating for children," he says, adding, "Have you heard this saying? 'To whom much is given, much is required.' In spite of all the roadblocks I've encountered, I've been given a lot. My health, a great mom and dad, great friends, a great future as a lawyer. Because I've been given so much, I feel an obligation to give back. But the most important thing I will do as an adult will be to be a great father. That's what it's all about."

—ELIZABETH ADAMS



"AT EACH STAGE
OF MY LIFE, WHEREVER
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SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS TOP TRAINING NEEDS

What are the top needs of those on the frontlines of making schools safer? The National Resource Center for Safe Schools has just completed a needs assessment, surveying those who coordinate Safe and Drug-Free Schools efforts in 28 states.

Among the findings of the telephone survey:

- Most states want children to be active participants in the safe school process. Youth involvement ideas range from having students discuss how to keep school safer to having students participate in carefully planned, mock-crisis events.

- Most states have mandated that schools have crisis-response plans in place. However, most of the state agencies have not created specific guidelines as to what the plans should include.

- Specifically requested needs include: training at state conferences and regional events; resources and information on crisis management planning; training on using the concepts outlined in *Early Warning, Timely Response*; information on research-based violence prevention programs.

"This survey will help us determine where assistance is most needed," says Pat Steele, NRCSS Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator, "so that we can work together to make schools safer across the country."

The survey also shows that states vary widely in "how prepared they are to respond to a crisis or to create safe school environments," Steele adds.

The NRCSS staff has been presenting information about safe schools to targeted audiences of educators across the country. NRCSS trainers have participated on panels and delivered workshops at national conferences and special events geared to helping make schools safer and more conducive to learning and teaching.

WATCH FOR NEW RESOURCES

Toolkit: A new resource to help school communities implement the violence-prevention concepts outlined last year in *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* is expected to be available by September. The toolkit will be published in both a traditional print format and also electronically on the World Wide Web, with hot links to other resources.

"It is intended to be a dynamic document," explains Kevin Dwyer, Principal Investigator of *Early Warning, Timely Response*. Published by the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice, *Early Warning, Timely Response* was developed at the direction of President Clinton after the school shootings at Thurston High School.

The new toolkit "helps school communities know what they need to do" to implement the research-based strategies described in *Early Warning, Timely Response*, Dwyer explains.

The toolkit outlines how to form a core team at the local school level that will establish a vision and set goals for prevention, intervention, and crisis

response. Links to model programs provide a look at how violence-prevention concepts can work in practice. Watch for more information about the release of the toolkit on the Web site of the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice (www.air.org/cecp), or the Web site of the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (www.safetyzone.org).

Annual Report: The second-annual *Report on School Safety*, published jointly by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, is due to be released this fall.

The first report, issued in October 1998, describes the nature and extent of crime and violence on school property. It also shows what measures some schools have taken to prevent or address school violence and provides parents, students, and educators with information and resources to evaluate and enhance their own school's level of safety.

The first report describes model programs that have demonstrated success in addressing the problems and issues related to school crime, including: aggression, fighting, bullying, family issues, gangs, bias-related conflict, sexual harassment, sexual violence, substance abuse, truancy, vandalism, and weapons.

Watch for information about the new report, or view the 1998 report, on the Web site of the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (www.safetyzone.org).

REFLECTIONS ON A TRAGEDY

GUEST COLUMN

By CATHY KENNEDY PAINE

SPRINGFIELD, Oregon—The shootings that occurred here in May 1998 have been a life-changing event for the community, the staff, and the students at Thurston High School. In a few, short moments on what seemed like an ordinary Thursday morning, we were transformed from innocent, unsuspecting individuals engaged in our normal routines to traumatized victims of a school shooting spree in which two students were killed and 22 seriously wounded.

A year later, we are still wondering what caused a 15-year-old freshman—the son of two professional educators—to bring three concealed weapons into school and spray 50 rounds of ammunition throughout the cafeteria. We are incredulous that this could happen here: The 57-acre campus of Thurston High is surrounded by middle-class homes just a few blocks from the beautiful McKenzie River. The school's buildings, which are designed with covered breezeways and a center outdoor courtyard, contain 15 outdoor entrances. Thurston High is a closed campus. The day of the shootings, the school was using surveillance cameras and campus monitors.

I had heard about school shootings in Pearl, Paducah, Jonesboro, and Edinboro, but I never thought it would happen in Springfield. I cannot overemphasize how big this crisis was and how its effects spread to every corner of our community. In my 22 years as a school psychologist, I had never encountered anything like the trauma at Thurston High.

How has this affected me?

First, this tragedy reminded me how precious and tentative life is. It made me anxious to go home every night and embrace my husband and children in long, “family” hugs. It made me extremely sad for the families and friends of victims Ben Walker and Mikael Nicholausen—two boys with life

before them one minute, life ended the next. As a school psychologist, I had known Mikael when he was in middle school. My most heart-wrenching moment occurred two days after the shooting when I took Mikael's mother, sister, and girlfriend to his locker to get his possessions. I was filled with their grief. This tragedy made me angry at the physical and emotional damage caused by the single act of a disturbed youth. It lasted just minutes, but the damage will take months and years to repair.

But there have been positive things to come from this, as well. This tragedy also made me realize how many good, caring, giving people there are in our community and our country: People who came by the hundreds to help in whatever way they could. People who have donated more than \$400,000 to the Thurston Healing Fund. People who came to say, “I care.” People like the 14 volunteers from the National Organization for Victim Assistance who left their homes at a moment's notice and flew across the country to help strangers in need.

Although this horrific school crisis made news for its brutality, it also brought about a demonstration of unity and camaraderie between school and community. This response was a combined effort of many people: school district psychologists, counselors, teachers, and administrators, as well as emergency responders, police, community counselors, personnel from the city of Springfield, the Lane County sheriff's office, and the district attorney's office. There were disagreements as well as agreements in the days following this tragedy, but overall our community can be proud of how its citizens responded.

What problems or needs remain?

We can't go back to the way we were. We are no longer unsuspecting individuals marginally affected by youth vio-

lence. This event has forced us to deal with a large-scale tragedy that even now demands our attention and our strength. On the first day of school this fall, reporters and media trucks surrounded the school once again as students returned to campus. Teachers asked students to be tolerant with one another as they work through a broad range of reactions and reminded them that, while many students are ready to move on, some are not.

The mental health recovery of the students and staff of Springfield is an ongoing process. With more than 1,500 students and staff on campus, this becomes more complex each day. The further we get from the event, the broader the range of responses becomes. Each student and staff member comes to school with a different mindset. Many say, “Let's get on with life, with school, with learning.”

But for the 300 students who were in the cafeteria that morning, it is not so simple to just get on with it. Twenty of the 22 injured students returned to Thurston High. For them, there are traumatic reminders: places and things that they see, smell, touch, or hear; an empty chair; a friend no longer there. Some still have the physical evidence of scars and carry bullets within them; they still face surgeries and lengthy rehabilitation. Some cannot yet return to the cafeteria and fear recurring violence. Newspaper and television stories trigger intrusive thoughts and feelings. Bereavement is complicated by traumatic grief.

There are so many others who have also been affected by this tragedy: the students and staff who were in the courtyard and in the adjacent hallways; the rest of the students in each class who knew the critically wounded; the siblings of these students; new students entering the high school, and

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“THIS TRAGEDY LASTED
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new teachers. In other Springfield schools and elsewhere in the community, there are friends and cousins, aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers, nieces and nephews, coaches and neighbors.

The one-year anniversary of the shooting has just passed. The days leading up to May 21 were filled with anticipation, anxiety, rumors of copycat violence, and daily doses of media attention. On the anniversary date attendance was low at Thurston High, a circumstance undoubtedly fueled by the Columbine High School massacre just one month before. Those who did go to class described a subdued and low-key atmosphere. The day began with bomb-sniffing dogs searching the campus and dozens of parents

patrolling the area, and continued with counselors and police officers present to support and reassure those who attended classes.

The day ended as more than 1,000 people gathered to remember the families of the victims in a Community Gathering for Remembrance and Renewal at Thurston High School. And now, in the days that follow, our community feels an enormous sense of relief and renewal, and we continue our journey toward recovery. Principal Larry Bentz told the students of Thurston High, "We have grieved together, laughed together, and worked our way down the path to healing together. The road is long and hard, but our progress has been steady. Thank you for keeping our faith in the future alive."

We have just begun to make plans to assist students and staff during the sus-

pect's trial in September, which will mark a new and unknown course of events that will challenge us once again. Kip Kinkel is charged with killing his own parents, Springfield teachers Bill and Faith Kinkel, in addition to the two Thurston students. And so we will begin yet another school year with this tragedy hanging over us.

The shooting in Littleton, Colorado, has added a new dimension of urgency to our efforts to promote safe schools and respond to school crises. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that every school in America have a safe school plan and the resources to adequately support students and staff in the aftermath of a crisis.

Cathy Kennedy Paine is Special Services Coordinator for the Springfield School District in Oregon.

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Washington Post, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Chicago Tribune, ABC, Dateline NBC, CNN, Scholastic News, The Christian Science Monitor, and the Tokyo Shimbun. Staff from the NRCSS responded to requests for information on a variety of topics including: violence prevention programs such as peer mediation and conflict resolution education; school security issues such as the use of metal detectors and the enforcement of zero-tolerance policies; crisis response; school-community partnerships; and gun control legislation.

• **ONLINE ASSISTANCE:** The Web site of the NRCSS is also gaining recognition as a source of information on school violence prevention. During April alone, the Center's home page received 1,485 electronic visitors. Top requests were for information regarding crisis response and facts and figures about school safety. The free publications that the Center makes available are also in high demand. More than 1,800 copies of *Peaceful Schools*, a publication of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, have been requested online.

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"Many people thought that, after the first year, life as they once knew it would resume. When it didn't, many parents and students felt angry and frustrated. Those who hoped to move on and forget the events of March 24, 1998, caused others at Westside High to feel angry and hurt. The crisis-response team helped our community cope with these feelings at the first anniversary."

READERS' CORNER

IMAGINING SOMETHING BETTER

I am in the seventh grade at Lambert Middle School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

I was scared at the Littleton shootings, because I had a crude awakening. I live in a little-known town, too. I thought my school might be next. After the Littleton shootings, two students were expelled for bringing a bullet and a knife to my school. A teacher saw [the contraband], and prevented a disaster. Another kid was suspended for saying to a teacher, "I'm going to blow your head off."

Today, I stopped a possible fight by suggesting a game of basketball to my friend, who was going to be the victim. The basketball courts are right next to where the teachers stand, so I knew we were safe.

I think it is best to be prepared. Bad things do happen. We should practice what to do in a real crisis.

Also, I would get a group together to be mentors. These students should not be violent themselves, or they might set a bad example. Each mentor could be assigned to ask three other students questions like: What did you get on your test? Do you need any help with that? How is school going? It is hard to get people to unite together, but if just one person would lend a hand to a student in need, it would help.

Violence is only another way of saying you need help. The whole United States of America knows people fight, harass, swear, and are rude. Let us, the future generation, change these childish actions into something better for the community.

Nathan Harig
Carlisle, Pennsylvania

KEEP PARENTS INFORMED

My daughter lives in Colorado. If my grandsons do not report to school in the morning, the school staff calls within an hour to inquire if everything is all right. I keep wondering why Columbine High didn't make such a call when the shooters were not in school.

I know that we cannot do anything to bring back those killed, but with all the copycats out there, isn't it time that we demand all schools to enact parent notification policies? Such a policy would not only increase student safety, but would also make our students feel safer. Only 11 states require such notification now. We need to include the rest. The National PTA adopted a parent notification resolution in 1985. If such a policy saves one child, one time, it will be justified.

Craig Mikkelsen
Mariposa, California

RETURN TO LEARNING

Thank you for sending the outstanding information. As teachers for 25 years, we have been impacted by the violence in our public schools.

Presently, I am recovering from two knee surgeries as a result of my intervention in a vicious fight. My attempt to protect a helpless student (pinned underneath a 200-pound student) caused serious damage to my knee.

We appreciate your efforts to return our schools to a place of learning—not fear!

Albert Watson
Diane Ross
Madison, Tennessee

TO OUR READERS

Readers' Corner is your forum. We invite readers of *The Safety Zone* to share ideas about creating and promoting safe schools. Help generate a national dialogue about peaceful schools. Write to us at: National Resource Center for Safe Schools, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, Oregon 97204, or submit letters electronically at safeschools@nwrel.org.

Looking for more ideas? The National Resource Center for Safe Schools is considering publication of a new magazine that would offer more indepth information about best practices for creating safe schools. Let us know if you would be interested in receiving this practical resource.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- August 12-14:** **Joint National Training Program on School Crisis Management**, sponsored by Safe Schools Coalition Inc., takes place in Orlando, Florida.
For information: Safe Schools Coalition Inc., P.O. Box 1338, Holmes Beach, Florida 34218-1338; (941) 778-6652. Web site: www.ed.mtu.edu/safe/
- August 29-September 3:** **North American Victim Assistance Conference, Victim Assistance: Moving Toward the Next Millennium**, takes place in Los Angeles, California. For information: NOVA, 1757 Park Road, NW, Washington, DC 20010; (202) 232-6682. Web site: www.try-nova.org/
- September 15:** **Safe and Effective Schools for All Students: What Works**, a satellite teleconference by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice, and several national organizations, will address how schools, families, and community agencies can collaborate to develop and maintain safe and effective schools.
For downlink information, call the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, (202) 944-5400, or toll free, (888) 457-1551. Web site: www.air.org/cecp
- October 15:** **Building Bridges: Strengthening Schools and Communities**, the fourth in a series of six satellite training forums produced by Partnerships for Preventing Violence, will be broadcast to facilitated sites across the country. For information, call: (877) 788-4774. To order videotapes of the previous three broadcasts, call the Harvard School of Public Health: (617) 432-2400.
Web site: www.walcoff.com/partnerships

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

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QUESTIONS
ABOUT SCHOOL
SAFETY?
ONLINE RESOURCES
HELP.
